

Mann, William. "Axis Journal Celebrates Fifteen Years and Transitions to New Partnership." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (Christian Brothers Conference: 2024).

© William Mann, FSC, DMin. Readers of this article have the copyright owner's permission to reproduce it for educational, not-for-profit purposes, if the author and publisher are acknowledged in the copy.

AXIS Journal Celebrates Fifteen Years and Transitions to New Partnership¹

Brother William Mann, DMin, FSC²

Introduction

AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education, a grass-roots initiative that was begun by three Lasallian Partners at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, celebrates its fifteenth year in 2024. With a first sixty-page issue of the online journal in 2009 (vol. 1, no. 1), the path forward was initially challenging and slow. No further issues were published until 2011, when continued commitment and hard work finally resulted in the online appearance of a second issue (vol. 2, no. 1) and third issue (vol. 2, no. 2).³

In November 2023, with the publication of its thirty-third issue (vol. 14, no. 1),⁴ the *AXIS Journal* [<https://axis.smumn.edu>] transitioned from being a project solely sponsored by Saint Mary's University of Minnesota to being a collaborative project jointly sponsored by the Region of Lasallian North America (RELAN) and its six institutions of higher education.⁵ As such, it transitioned to a new website [<https://axisjournal.org>]. Although remaining an English-language only journal, manuscripts will continue to be welcomed and published from the sixty plus member institutions of the International Association of La Salle Universities (IALU) and other interested Lasallian scholars. A thirty-fourth issue (vol. 14, no. 2) was published in December 2023.

The Idea of a Journal

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota has a rich Lasallian Catholic heritage. Brother Louis DeThomasis, who led Saint Mary's almost continuously from 1984 to 2008, promoted a growing spirit of association among Lasallian Partners and Brothers and fostered a deepening of the understanding of the university's Lasallian Catholic heritage. His efforts coincided with a growing appreciation of the role and importance of tertiary education within the larger worldwide network of Lasallian schools and agencies.⁶

When the Lasallian Association of Colleges and Universities (LACU) in the USA launched the International Lasallian Leadership Program at the La Salle Casa Generalizia in Rome (a collaborative project with IALU) in June 2007, it was therefore no surprise that professors and administrators of Saint Mary's University eagerly enrolled in the two-week program. This community-based formation program

was a direct outcome of a project that John R. Wilcox of Manhattan College completed as part of his participation in the RELAN's Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies.⁷ John

recognized a need in the world of Lasallian higher education for more formation for campus leaders ... to immerse them in the heritage of our universities, to facilitate understanding of the worldwide Lasallian higher education network, and to promote cooperation among these universities.⁸

Every year since its inception a cohort of about fifty administrators and professors from member institutions of IALU have continued to enroll in what has come to be known as the Rome IALU Program, where participants are expected to design a project that could potentially foster cooperation among the network's institutions. The participants from Saint Mary's in the inaugural program of 2007 chose as their project the auspicious goal of initiating an online international journal in service of the Lasallian higher education network. This was how the *AXIS Journal* was conceived.

The Early Days of the Journal

The three professors who travelled from Minnesota to Rome in June 2007 to attend the Rome IALU Program were a quite exceptional group of Lasallian Partners (Valerie Edwards-Robeson, Roxanne Eubank, and Richard Tristano).⁹

They articulated a vision of what was originally conceived as a peer-reviewed, multi-language journal in the following terms:

AXIS welcomes and continuously reviews scholarly and creative works which contribute to collective knowledge of the shared Lasallian mission in higher education contexts. Formats may include but are not limited to empirical research reports, theoretical/conceptual papers, and case studies. Topics may include but are not limited to theory, description, and assessment of: (a) diverse contexts of Lasallian higher education, including formation structures and policies that support the development of colleges and universities as models of just communities; (b) distinctively Lasallian pedagogy, especially in terms of impact on learning and other aspects of human development; and (c) solidarity initiatives that explicitly activate Lasallian higher education institutions and their community partners in describing, measuring, and responding to social injustice.¹⁰

The name chosen by its founders for the journal—*AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*—had its origin in the keynote address that the then superior general of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools had given at the inaugural Rome IALU Program of June 2007.¹¹ In that address, Brother Álvaro pointed out “some *axes* through which the influence and impact of IALU could be felt with more strength and effectiveness”: (a) “to continue seeking to offer quality education”; (b) to prioritize “research focused on reality and quality education for the service of society’s poor, disenfranchised, and displaced”; and (c) the importance that all Lasallians (researchers, faculty, and students) “feel the call to respond actively through their faith in their concrete professional work.”

Valerie, Roxanne, and Richard proved to be quite successful in finding other Lasallians at Saint Mary's to work together with them on this project; and the university's president (Brother Louis DeThomasis) gave the project his tacit approval. The main challenge they encountered, however,

was getting colleagues at other institutions of higher education in the Lasallian network, which often seem more competitive than synergistic, to collaborate, together and by association, on the realization of their dream for a journal.

In the first issue of the *AXIS Journal* that as previously noted appeared in 2009, an article entitled “Lasallian Assessment: Charism and the University,” which was co-authored by one of the journal’s founders (Richard Tristano) with three colleagues at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota (Mary Catherine Fox, Melissa Luedtke, and Sister Judith Schaefer, OP),¹² proposed both a model of an integrated view of the Lasallian Catholic university and a seven-part Lasallian assessment instrument. In a final two-page “afterword” to the article, the authors incorporated feedback, which is referenced as “valuable suggestions” solicited from other participants of the Rome IALU Program in 2007 to an initial draft of the article. This article provides a good glimpse into how the original founders of the journal envisaged its functioning.

The Refashioning of the Journal

The actualization and implementation of the original project and the solicitation of manuscripts from Lasallian colleagues around the world proved more challenging than initially anticipated. After about two years of work on the journal, those who conceived it and others who had begun to work together with them on the project at Saint Mary’s University were about to “call it quits.” Before doing so, however, Valerie Edwards-Robeson¹³ and Sister Judith Schaefer decided to discuss the matter with Brother William Mann, who had succeeded Brother Louis as president of the university in June 2008.¹⁴

Valerie and Sister Judith (both of whom were to do the lion’s share of the work of stabilizing and assuring the future of the peer-reviewed journal) met with Brother William over the course of a few weeks and the three worked closely to re-focus and re-fashion the vision of the *AXIS Journal* along a more sustainable pathway. A part-time copy editor (Annmarie De Marais¹⁵) was hired to work closely with Valerie and Sister Judith, who assumed the function of managing editors. A new four-part structure (original scholarship and creative works,¹⁶ shared knowledge archive,¹⁷ annotations of dissertations and distinctive works of Lasallian higher education,¹⁸ and occasional selective bibliographies on Lasallian topics¹⁹) was introduced.²⁰ A decision was made that the *AXIS Journal* would only be published in one language (English). In addition to free online access to the journal, the option of purchasing on-demand bound print issues was introduced [www.lulu.com].²¹

Brother William was successful in inviting an internationally recognized group of Lasallians (Brothers Frederick Mueller, Donald Mouton, Robert Schieler, Leonardo Teijaro, and George Van Grieken) to join with him and with personnel from Saint Mary’s University (Annmarie DeMarais, Valerie Edwards-Robeson, Roxanne Eubank, Richard Tristano, and Sister Judith Schaefer) on the board of editors.²²

As some editors moved off the board, other Lasallian Partners and Brothers (Timothy Gossen, Brother Lawrence Humphrey, Gregory Kopra, Alisa Macksey, Matthew Nowakowski, and Brother Robert Smith)²³ came forward to assure the quality and future of the journal. As these transitions occurred, Tim Gossen and Alisa Macksey²⁴ of Saint Mary’s stepped up to replace

Valerie, Sister Judith, and Annmarie as associate editors responsible for assuring the work of managing the journal and copy editing. Without their dedication and hard work, the journal might at this point have faltered and failed.

The fact that (a) Roxanne Eubank, one of the initial three founders of the journal, became the director of the Rome IALU Program from 2009 to 2018, that (b) Saint Mary's University began to host an annual International Lasallian Research Symposium on its Minneapolis campus,²⁵ and that (c) Brother William led IALU from 2015 to 2018 greatly helped to raise the profile of the *AXIS Journal* in the IALU network of colleges and universities.

As his term as president of Saint Mary's University was coming to a close in academic year 2017-2018, Brother William in his dual roles as president of IALU and editor-in-chief of the *AXIS Journal* had some exploratory conversations with Carlos Coelho, executive director of IALU [<https://ialu.org>], about the possibilities of (a) transitioning the *AXIS Journal* to IALU sponsorship as its English-language journal and (b) proposing that Rome's *Digital Journal of Lasallian Research* might become IALU's Spanish-language journal; but nothing ever came of these discussions. However, it was already becoming clear that the *AXIS Journal* had grown into something larger and more significant than merely that of being a project solely sponsored by Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.

The Transition of the Journal's Sponsorship

More serious discussions were initiated in 2019 with Mark Freund, executive director of RELAN's Office for Lasallian Education at Christian Brothers Conference, about transitioning the journal to sponsorship by RELAN. Tim Gossen took the lead in these discussions, and Mark and Brother William began discussing this matter with RELAN's Lasallian Publications Committee on which they both served.²⁶ It was always clear in any of these discussions that the journal would need to remain connected to one or other (or all) of the Lasallian institutions of higher education (LACU).

The time to pursue joint sponsorship seemed right. Manuscripts were regularly being submitted for publication by professors at the LACU institutions. Some of the journal's principal protagonists had retired or transitioned away from Saint Mary's, and other LACU institutions were increasingly open to supporting and jointly "owning" the *AXIS Journal*.²⁷ Brother William in his role as editor-in-chief had been taking on more and more work in the past couple of years in managing, copy editing, and keeping the journal going forward.

When Thomas (Tom) Southard replaced Mark as executive director of RELAN's Christian Brothers Conference in 2022, the idea of transitioning finally gained momentum, and the meeting of the RELAN Lasallian Publications Committee in New Orleans in January 2023 embraced the collaboration.²⁸ Tom held meetings with Father James Burns, president of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota since 2018, and with the vice presidents for mission of the LACU institutions to secure agreement for the transition. Elizabeth (Liz) Moors Jodice at Christian Brothers Conference also embraced the transition and she has worked with Tim, Alisa, and Brother William with its implementation. Tom and Liz have proven to be incredibly supportive of the efforts of the journal's editors in assuring a smooth transition.

Christian Brothers Conference has recently hired Matt Nowakowski²⁹ as a part-time managing editor for the journal. The board of editors of the journal will continue in their present role as the manner of when and how to introduce new editors, and how to rotate some current editors off the board, is worked out. The journal also now has the support of a group of representatives from each LACU higher education institution, who will help encourage writers, integrate the journal on their campuses, and support the publication in other ways.

Conclusion

The *AXIS Journal*, at the time of its inception, clearly filled a vacuum and met a need in the network of Lasallian institutions of higher education; but what assured its longevity was really the dedication and service of a few generous Lasallians and a synergy that was the consequence of a number of interlocking relationships and events.

It was never the work of one person. Rather, a team of colleagues passionate about the Lasallian educational mission and higher education worked tirelessly, together and by association, in the Lasallian spirit of faith and zeal on behalf of Lasallian scholarship in service of mission. Change is a part of life; and so, as the editors of the *AXIS Journal* celebrate its fifteen-year milestone and its transition into being a collaborative project jointly sponsored by RELAN and LACU, they do so in hope and confidence that the adaptations and adjustments that are inevitable will be part of a process that both strengthens the journal and preserves the role it has played in fostering the bonds of union and clarity of mission-centric identity in Lasallian institutions of higher education.

A strong commitment to quality Lasallian formation,³⁰ like “yeast mixed in with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened” (Lk 13:20), awakened and nurtured the imaginations of Lasallian colleagues at Saint Mary’s University to do something in service of all Lasallians in higher education. The remarks of a superior general about “some *axes* through which the influence and impact of the International Association of La Salle Universities could be felt with more strength and effectiveness”³¹ were, in many ways, like “a mustard seed planted in a garden which became a large bush” (Lk 13:19). The *AXIS Journal* is, and it is hoped will continue to be, a strong and clear example of what shared mission,³² Lasallian association,³³ and working together and by association can accomplish.

¹ An abbreviated version of this article was published in *De La Salle Today: A Magazine for the Lasallian Family in the Lasallian Region of North America* (Autumn, 2023): 28-30.

² Brother William Mann is president emeritus of Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota and editor-in-chief of *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*. He is a former vicar general of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2000-2007) and the immediate past president of the International Association of La Salle Universities (2015-2018), who earned his doctorate in ministry at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

³ This journal is not to be confused with *Digital Journal of Lasallian Research*, an online journal sponsored by the Center of the Institute in Rome that also focuses on a variety of Lasallian topics, which began publication in 2010 and had published its twenty-first issue before its editors decided to pause publication in 2019.

⁴ With the thirty-fourth issue, the *AXIS Journal* had published some 4,300 pages of articles and addresses on topics of interest to Lasallians in the worldwide educational network.

⁵ The six institutions of Lasallian higher education in the USA that belong to LACU are Christian Brothers University in Tennessee, La Salle University in Pennsylvania, Lewis University in Illinois, Manhattan College in New York, Saint Mary's College of California, and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.

⁶ Cf. Joan M. W. Landeros, "The Lasallian International University Network: Progress and Promise," *Bulletin 252: Lasallian Centers of Higher Education*, by Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (Rome, 2010): 5-18.

⁷ Cf. John R. Wilcox, PhD, "Charism in Association: Structuring the Lasallian Educational Mission in Catholic Higher Education," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, no. 2 (2017): 123-178.

⁸ Roxanne Eubank, EdD, "The International Lasallian University Leadership Program in Rome," *Bulletin 252: Lasallian Centers of Higher Education* by Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (Rome, 2010): 51.

⁹ Valerie Edwards-Robeson, MSSW, belonged to the undergraduate social sciences faculty; Roxanne Eubank, EdD, belonged to the graduate education doctoral faculty; and Richard Tristano, PhD, belonged to the undergraduate history faculty.

¹⁰ Cf. "Author Guidelines" at axis.smumn.edu.

¹¹ Cf. Brother Álvaro Rodríguez-Echevarría, "Our Lasallian Universities: A Path of Mission and Association," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2018): 119-131. This is the same address given at Encuentro VIII (the triennial meeting IALU's presidents/rectors) that was held in Canoas, Brazil, in January 2007; and the address can also be found with a slightly differently worded translation in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2009): 3-13.

¹² Mary Catherine Fox, PhD, belonged to the undergraduate interdisciplinary studies faculty; Melissa Luedtke, EdD, belonged to the undergraduate education faculty; and Sister Judith K. Schaefer, OP, PhD, belonged to the undergraduate theology and graduate pastoral ministry faculties.

¹³ Valerie Edwards-Robeson was initially responsible for getting the cooperation of members of the marketing and communications department at Saint Mary's to assist her when it was time to format and upload the journal onto the website. Alisa Macksey and Tim Gossen succeeded in assuring this partnership once Valerie's work with the journal was finished.

¹⁴ During his presidency (2008-2018), a priority was the awakening, nurturing, and empowering of university personnel and students of Saint Mary's in the Lasallian Catholic heritage, identity, and charism. Together with the *AXIS Journal* and the International Symposium of Lasallian Research, a benefactor-funded First Generation Initiative (First Generation Scholars for university students and Countdown-2-College for secondary-school students) and a concerted effort (with the support of benefactors) on behalf of quality formation for mission were among its more obvious manifestations.

¹⁵ Annmarie De Marais, MA, was an assistant to the university's director of the master's degree in pastoral ministry.

¹⁶ While open to occasional single-themed issues, the editors of the *AXIS Journal* intentionally favored a diversity of Lasallian topics in single issues as a way of expressing the rich fulness and depth of the Lasallian heritage, identity, and charism.

¹⁷ With the "shared knowledge archive," addresses of superiors general and vicars general of the Institute (past and present) and significant writings of Lasallian scholars (e.g., Brothers Leo Burkhard, Miguel Campos, Maurice-Auguste Hermans, Yves Poutet, Jean Pungier, Gerard Rummery, Luke Salm, and Michel Sauvage) were made more easily accessible to the wider international Lasallian audience. The editors of the *AXIS Journal* valued the idea of creating a readily accessible online space (a kind of "virtual file cabinet") where important Lasallian documents and talks would be freely available to all.

¹⁸ To date, annotations of almost ninety dissertations and distinctive works of Lasallian Catholic scholarship have been published in the journal. Dissertations that have been annotated have come from a wide range of universities in Australia, Brazil, England, Italy, Mexico, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, and USA. Tim Gossen and Brother William were primarily, but not exclusively, responsible for identifying and inviting people to annotate dissertations, with all of the editors committed to helping with this aspect of the journal. There are already some thirty additional dissertations identified and ready for annotation in future issues of the *AXIS Journal*.

¹⁹ Bibliographies have covered such topics as the life and writings of John Baptist de La Salle, Lasallian spirituality, Lasallian pedagogy, history of the Brothers and of the Lasallian educational mission, and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

²⁰ In addition, decisions were made to include major keynote addresses from important Institute gatherings (Chapters, Assemblies, IALU Encuentros, and Conferences), remarks made at the reception of honorary doctorates for significant contributions to the Lasallian educational network, and keynote addresses and "white papers" from the International Lasallian Research Symposium of IALU that was hosted at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. Alisa and Brother William were primarily, but not exclusively, responsible for identifying and getting permission for the inclusion of these texts.

²¹ The option of these on-demand print issues was the result of a conversation between Brother William and Brother George Van Grieken.

²² Brother Frederick C. Mueller, EdD (2009-present), Brother Donald Mouton, STD (2009-2019), Brother Robert Schieler, EdD (2009-present), Brother Leonardo Teijaro, JCD (2009-2014), and Brother George Van Grieken, PhD (2009-present) were from outside the university. Annmarie DeMarais, MA (2009-2015), Valerie Edwards-Robeson, MSSW (2009-2015), Roxanne Eubank, EdD (2009-present), Brother William Mann, DMin (2009-present), Sister Judith K. Schaefer, OP, PhD (2009-2019), and Richard Tristano, PhD (2009-2018) were from inside the university.

²³ Gregory Kopra, EdD (2014-present), was from outside the university. Timothy Gossen, EdD (2014-present), Brother Lawrence Humphrey, PhD cand. (2012-2014), Alisa Macksey, EdD cand. (2015-present), Matthew Nowakowski, EdD (2020-present), and Brother Robert Smith, PhD (2020-present) were from inside the university.

²⁴ Alisa was responsible for eventually getting the articles of the *AXIS Journal* indexed by the Association of Theological Library Associates (ATLA).

²⁵ “This symposium, which was held between 2012–2019, annually gathered some 100+ members of the international Lasallian higher education community around topics related to scholarly Lasallian research with an eye to the future.”

²⁶ Three members of the board of editors of the journal were members of RELAN’s Lasallian Publications Committee: Greg Kopra, Brother William Mann, and Brother George Van Grieken.

²⁷ As one of the six LACU institutions in the USA, the leadership of Saint Mary’s will continue to support the journal as it also focuses on other newer initiatives.

²⁸ An ongoing discussion in the committee was about (a) how to foster writing workshops (research, publishing, accessibility, and formation) that “create resources that are at the intersection of Lasallian heritage and current issues” and (b) how to assure the publication of materials that authentically communicate and support Lasallian Catholic “mission, identity, and vocation.”

²⁹ Matt Nowakowski, who as managing editor will oversee the *AXIS* process and support authors in collaboration with Christian Brothers Conference, the editorial board, and Brother William Mann, who will continue to serve as editor-in-chief, was a longtime educator at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota. Dr. Nowakowski has served on the *AXIS* editorial board since 2020. While he retired from Saint Mary’s in December 2022 after fifteen years, he continues to serve as a dissertation advisor and course-contracted professor in the doctor of education-leadership program. He is a graduate of the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies.

³⁰ Cf. Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim’s Handbook* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2019).

³¹ Brother Álvaro Rodríguez-Echevarría, “Our Lasallian Universities: A Path of Mission and Association,” *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2018): 127.

³² Cf. Brothers of the Christian Schools, *The Lasallian Mission of Human & Christian Education: A Shared Mission* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997).

³³ Cf. Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Bulletin 250: Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2005).